

Message Text

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EXDIS DISTRIBUTE AS NODIS FOR AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1, 2

TAGS: MOPS, PEPR, IS, LE, SY

SUBJECT: LEBANON PROBLEM

REF: TEL AVIV 11400

1. YOU SHOULD GET IN TOUCH SOONEST WITH MOST SENIOR AND
APPROPRIATE SYRIAN OFFICIAL AVAILABLE TO REQUEST THAT THE
FOLLOWING POINTS FROM THE SECRETARY (IN EFFECT AN ORAL
MESSAGE) BE CONVEYED TO PRESIDENT ASSAD:

-- WE ARE DEEPLY DISTURBED BY THE RECENT TREND OF HOSTI-
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LITIES IN LEBANON. THE HUMANITARIAN ASPECT OF OUR CONCERN
IS THAT MEMBERS OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN LARGE NUMBERS
ARE FLEEING LEBANON OR ARE BEING DRIVEN INTO ARMS OF
MILITANTS. THERE IS ALSO A SHARP INCREASE IN CONCERN HERE
AND ELSEWHERE THAT POSSIBLE DESTRUCTION OF A KEY ELEMENT
IN DELICATE LEBANESE POLITICAL BALANCE WOULD MAKE IT ALL
BUT IMPOSSIBLE TO REBUILD UNITY OF LEBANESE STATE--A GOAL

WHICH WE BELIEVE THE U.S. AND SYRIA SHARE. OUR STRATEGIC CONCERN IS THAT CONTINUATION OF CURRENT COURSE COULD LEAD TO WIDER HOSTILITIES WITH INCALCULABLE CONSEQUENCES.

-- IT HAS BEEN AND REMAINS OUR PRACTICE NOT TO CONVEY ISRAELI MESSAGES OR WARNINGS TO SYRIA, DESPITE WHAT THE PRESS MAY REPORT. HOWEVER, I BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO BE SURE YOU ARE AWARE OF MY OWN APPRECIATION OF THE PRESENT MOOD THERE.

-- I KNOW FROM MY OWN TALKS WITH ISRAELI LEADERS DURING MY VISIT TO ISRAEL EARLY THIS MONTH THAT THEY REMAIN DEEPLY SUSPICIOUS OF SYRIA AND OF SYRIA'S ROLE IN LEBANON. WE RECOGNIZE THAT THE SYRIAN FORCES IN LEBANON, ALONG WITH CONTINGENTS FROM SUDAN, SAUDI ARABIA AND THE UAE, ARE THERE AT THE REQUEST OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT AND WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE ARAB LEAGUE FOR THE EXPRESSED PURPOSE OF PRESERVING THE UNITY OF LEBANON AND RESTORING THE AUTHORITY OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. THE ISRAELIS AT TIMES HAVE TACITLY ACCEPTED THIS ROLE BUT IN LIGHT OF RECENT SYRIAN MOVES AGAINST CHRISTIAN AREAS, THEY AGAIN SEE SYRIAN MOVES AS STEPS IN A STRATEGY OF ASSUMING A DOMINANT ROLE IN LEBANON AND PREPARING A SECOND FRONT AGAINST ISRAEL. THAT PERCEPTION AROUSES DEEP CONCERN IN ISRAEL AND HEAVY PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE ACTION. I BELIEVE THESE PRESSURES TO TAKE ACTION HAVE REACHED A NEW INTENSITY

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IN RECENT DAYS. AS LONG AS CONFRONTATIONS IN LEBANON OCCUR, MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND MISCALCULATIONS ABOUT SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN ISRAEL COULD ALL TOO EASILY LEAD TO GREATER ISRAELI INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON. IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT THIS BE FORESTALLED.

-- THESE IMPRESSIONS GAINED DURING MY OWN RECENT TALKS IN ISRAEL ARE UNDERSCORED BY MORE RECENT DISCUSSIONS OUR REPRESENTATIVES HAVE HAD WITH ISRAELI LEADERS.

-- WHILE THE USG AND I PERSONALLY HAVE MADE SUSTAINED AND STRONG EFFORTS IN URGING RESTRAINT UPON THE ISRAELIS, THERE IS A LIMIT TO WHAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO DO IF THE SITUATION IN LEBANON CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE. AN ACCIDENTAL CLASH BETWEEN ISRAELI AND SYRIAN AIRCRAFT FLYING OVER LEBANON COULD ALL TOO EASILY OCCUR, AND THIS COULD PRECIPITATE DANGEROUS NEW TENSIONS. WE ARE URGING THE ISRAELIS TO EXERCISE THE MOST RIGID DISCIPLINE AND PRUDENCE TO PREVENT INADVERTENT CLASHES OR A CONTEST FOR CONTROL OF THE AIRSPACE OVER LEBANON. WE URGE SYRIA TO DO LIKEWISE.

-- OUR PURPOSE IN SHARING THIS ASSESSMENT IS NOT TO DISCUSS RESPONSIBILITY FOR RECENT EVENTS. SYRIA TOO IS DEEPLY SUSPICIOUS OF ISRAELI INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON'S AFFAIRS. ISRAEL CERTAINLY IS NOT WITHOUT BLAME FOR SOME OF THE TENSIONS AND TROUBLES WHICH HAVE ENGULFED LEBANON. OUR PURPOSE IS TO BE SURE SYRIA FULLY UNDERSTANDS THE SITUATION IN WHICH ITS ACTIONS ARE BEING TAKEN AND TO URGE THE UTMOST CAUTION.

-- IN ADDITION TO SHARING THIS ASSESSMENT WITH YOU, I MUST ALSO EXPRESS THE DEEP CONCERN OF MANY AMERICANS, SOME WITH RELATIVES IN LEBANON, ABOUT WHERE THE SITUATION
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IN LEBANON IS HEADING. THE PROSPECT OF FURTHER CHANGES IN THE DELICATE POLITICAL COMPOSITION IN LEBANON RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW LEBANESE UNITY CAN BE RESTORED. AS LONG AS THE CIVIL WAR CONTINUES, THERE WILL BE LITTLE POSSIBILITY IN MOVING TOWARD THAT GOAL WHICH IS OF CONCERN TO ALL OF US. IT SEEMS TO ME CRUCIAL THAT A MAJOR EFFORT NOW BE MADE TO HALT THE FIGHTING ONCE AND FOR ALL SO THAT ATTENTION CAN TURN TO THAT BASIC OBJECTIVE.

-- WHAT I BELIEVE MUST NOW BE DONE--URGENTLY--IS TO HELP BRING ABOUT A REAL AND LASTING CEASEFIRE AND A BREATHING SPELL DURING WHICH THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF THE VARIOUS CONFRONTATIONS IN LEBANON COULD BE DEALT WITH. WE KNOW THAT DURING PAST CEASEFIRES, PROVOCATIONS AGAINST SYRIAN FORCES HAVE OCCURRED. YET, SINCE SYRIA'S PUBLICLY STATED POLICY, IN ADDITION TO ATTEMPTING TO PRESERVE LAW AND ORDER ON BEHALF OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT, IS TO RESPOND ONLY TO MAJOR PROVOCATIONS, IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO GO ONE STEP FURTHER AND REDUCE THE CHANCES OF NEW PROVOCATIONS FROM ELEMENTS HOSTILE TO SYRIA. THIS MIGHT TAKE PLACE IF SYRIAN FORCES WOULD STAND FAST WHERE THEY ARE NOW AND END OR CUT DOWN THE MOVEMENT OF SYRIAN FORCES THROUGH AREAS WHERE PROVOCATIONS ARE LIKELY TO OCCUR.

-- IF THE SYRIAN FORCES MADE A DETERMINED EFFORT TO REMAIN ONLY IN WELL PROTECTED AND HEAVILY FORTIFIED POSITIONS, REASONABLY SAFE FROM PROVOCATIONS--FOR AT LEAST A WHILE--THE REPEATED SERIES OF PROVOCATIONS AND COUNTERACTIONS COULD PERHAPS BE INTERRUPTED. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, SYRIANS CONTINUE TO ADVANCE IN FORCE INTO AREAS WHERE SYRIAN FORCES HAVE NOT BEEN INVOLVED PREVIOUSLY, AND PARTICULARLY IN THE MOUNT LEBANON HEARTLAND, I FEAR THAT THE SITUATION WILL CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE AND THE RISK
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OF ESCALATION WILL GROW RAPIDLY. IN OUR VIEW, IT MIGHT BE PREFERABLE FOR THE TIME BEING FOR SYRIAN FORCES TO REMAIN ALOOF FROM FIGHTING THAT ERUPTS BETWEEN LEBANESE GROUPS AND FACTIONS.

-- I APPRECIATE THE RENEWED ASSURANCES ABOUT SYRIA'S OBJECTIVES THAT HAVE BEEN CONVEYED IN RECENT DAYS TO US BY FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM AND DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER TO SYRIA'S WELL-BEING AND SECURITY.

2. MAKE CLEAR TO THE SYRIANS THAT WE WILL, IF ASKED, FLATLY DENY THAT WE HAVE CONVEYED AN ISRAELI WARNING TO THE SYRIANS. WE WILL SAY MERELY THAT WE HAVE CONTINUED TO BE IN TOUCH WITH THE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES ON THE SITUATION IN LEBANON. HOWEVER, PLEASE BE CERTAIN THAT SARG UNDERSTANDS FROM THIS MESSAGE THAT THE ATMOSPHERE IN JERUSALEM IS INCREASINGLY TENSE ABOUT THE LEBANESE SITUATION AND THAT WE ARE CONVINCED A DANGEROUS TRAIN OF EVENTS COULD QUICKLY DEVELOP. CHRISTOPHER

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